

Contributions

WHY I AM A MEMBER OF THE BRETHREN CHURCH

A SYMPOSIUM

BY

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The above question was sent to me with the request that I be the first person singular in the sentence and write for publication in the EVANGELIST an answer to the same. In obedience to which request I will proceed to notice:

1. What is a member? (a) It is a part of a whole. (b) An independent constituent. (c) One of the persons composing a society. (d) An individual forming an organization.

These facts stated it follows that if I am a member of the Brethren church, the Brethren church must be a whole, a society, a constitution, an organization.

This being settled we take it for granted, that in these times of free thought and liberal expression of opinion, all members have equal rights, that there is absolutely no difference between the members, so far as their different degrees of ability enable them to accomplish more good, and for this they should by no means be envied or despised, but highly esteemed according to the measure of their success. But while all enjoy the same privileges, all are equally under obligation to be in subjection to one another. "For as we have many members in one body and all members have not the same office, so we being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." Rom. 12: 4, 5.

What we mean to show by this discourse is how the Brethren church must be organized in order to claim membership at our hands and if she is not so organized, the best thing the different conferences can do is to take the necessary steps to bring such organization about, for it has been our settled conviction for a number of years that there is too much of a disposition among us for every one to interpret and apply the gospel according to his own fancy whether it suited the rest of us or not. I will cite a case in point just here. Brother Moomaw has upon several occasions, justly and properly declared against the evils of war. What is the sentiment of the church upon that question? Some no doubt will say, "Oh we uphold the peace principles." What evidence is there of the fact? Absolutely none. If war was to break out in the complicated affairs of the world tomorrow, and the United States were to be deeply involved so that our chief executive would find it necessary to call all able-bodied men to arms, what proof could we show that as a church we hold to the non-resistant principles? Absolutely none, and away our young men would be marched to the field of battle.

The same might be said of about every cardinal doctrine of the gospel, there is absolutely no legal evidence that we as a church believe in trine immersion, feet washing, or the Lord's Supper, unless the condescending admission of the greatly resigned D. C. Christner, "that we understand these things to be taught," might be construed into legal evidence, which is questionable. What I should like to see is a better organization and I hope when Brother Gnagey shows us the "need of a catechism for the Brethren church" at the Ohio State Conference, he will so completely unearth the weak spirit in our organization that the scales of prejudice against all forms and manner of creeds will fall from all eyes. But admitting for the sake of argument that the Brethren church is an organization, and that I am a member of the same, *why* am I a member? Answer, first, because the large majority of the church believe with me that the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation and believe that a genuine repentance and obedience to the gospel constitute true and saving faith. Second, I am a member of the Brethren church with the cherished hope that ultimately the church even tho it be after I have left the shores of mortality will find her proper moorings in a complete, substantial and loyal organization. In this I walk by faith and I think almost have the goal in sight, for I am persuaded there is too much at stake to allow her to drift much longer upon the quicksands of experimentalism. Third, I am a member of the Brethren church because my life has in a great measure been devoted to her care and I have many dear friends there, and I might say many sons and daughters in the gospel whom I love and for whom I shall labor as well as pray that they may be true and faithful until death. Fourth, I am a member of the Brethren church because I believe that the general tone of her teaching is more in accordance with the teaching of the Holy Spirit than that of any other church and I hope finally thru her help, her organization present and prospective, be able to land upon the sunny banks of deliverance.

P. J. BROWN.

First, because we cannot perform all the functions of a Christian without belonging to an organization. The contention that we can serve God as effectually outside of an organization is erroneous.

Second, because the doctrines of the Brethren organization are nearer the apostolical than any other.

(a) The conditions on which our baptism is administered make the ordinance effectual on the faith of the recipient and not on the fitness of the administrator.

(b) We require a simple confession of faith in Christ and repentance toward God and a covenant to take the gospel as our only rule and do not supplement that with a demand that the recipient pledge to conform to certain absurd and nonsensical cus-

toms which they have no intention to perform.

(c) Our times of communion open the table of the Lord to all of God's children, by making the duty of *self* examination the test. The contention that the Lord has no other sheep than those of our fold is unscriptural, illogical and unnatural, and to exclude any of them from his table is unscriptural, illogical, unfraternal and disloyal. The argument of close communionists that we who practice differently open the table to unworthy people would destroy the ordinance utterly as we cannot judge a fellow member's fitness. That fitness is determined by internal conditions and we have no cognizance of the internal.

Third, the conditions on which we admit members to the performance of official functions are purity of life and doctrine and aptness to teach, and not a pledge to adhere to absurd and obsolete customs that have no religious significance, and a further pledge to enforce those customs on others. We adhere strictly to the apostolic instructions and examples.

Fourth, we teach and practice, as far as possible, the doctrine of ministerial support as the only system that can make the ministry effectual. It is in perfect accord with the gospel, and practice of the apostles and the contention that the ministers should follow some secular calling in order to support his family deprives the membership of the sacred duty and privilege of contributing to the cause of the Lord as the gospel so plainly teaches.

Fifth, the loyalty of our membership to our Lord is conditioned on purity of life and soundness of doctrine and not adherence to ridiculous and unscriptural customs that change with the whims of ignorant men and women.

Sixth, the discipline of our congregations is administered by the congregation where the offences originate, and not by self-appointed committees of men from distant congregations who are practically responsible to nobody for their misjudgments. Such a procedure is a travesty on justice and common sense.

D. C. MOOMAW.

Sam Jones said: "I am a Methodist for the same reason that I am a Jones, and if it is a sin for me to be a Methodist, it is a sin for me to be a Jones, for I was born both." This, of course, is regarded as a "smart" saying because it came from the "only Sam," and the entire absence of any principle of logic in the argument is passed by without notice. One might as well argue that it is no sin for him to be a Mormon or a Mohammedan because he was born such. But, leaving out the question of sin, it is true that multitudes of people are what they are for the same reason that Sam Jones is a Methodist. And the reason is not altogether without virtue, else what the good of parental training? Most of the members of the